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ABSTRACT

Part of a series of philosophical readers, this story for elementary school children presents two characters, Kio and Gus, who are sensitive to ideas, language, and the world around them. The book consists largely of dialogue as each character narrates his/her story. In the course of a summer, Kio visits his grandfather's farm and befriends Gus, who is blind. Gus helps Kio become aware of the world as the blind experience it and of the creative activities of those who are blind. Concepts presented include contrasts between fantasy and reality, fear and courage, saying and doing, and truth and beauty. (KC)

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KIO & GUS

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INTRODUCTION

No fooling—do you *really* want to know what I did last summer?

Okay, I'll tell you. It was neat.

It was the summer of the farm and all the animals. It was the summer of the big whale—Grandpa's *wonderful* whale, named Leviathan.

Do you know much about whales? I didn't. I mean, before this summer, I hardly ever *thought* about whales.

Oh, yes, it was also the summer of the haunted house by the lake. Is the idea of a haunted house a scary idea? I used to think so, but that was before we visited the haunted house by the lake in the middle of the night!

What else happened last summer? Let me think.

Oh, I know: it was last summer that I met Gus.

Hold on—Gus wants to say something.

Kio! You didn't tell about how it's *our* story, and how *you're* going to tell it for a while, then *I'm* going to tell it for a while!

I'm going to tell how I play Roger, Kio's cat, and how I make believe I'm a firefly or a mole or a bat. Have *you* ever wondered what it's like to be a bat?

I can't help wondering what it must be like to be Leviathan. Or to be Kio's grandfather.

I even wonder if anyone has ever wondered what it would be like to understand everything. I know *I* wouldn't like it. What would there be left to wonder about?

CHAPTER ONE

i

"Kio," Gus says to me, "Where's Roger?"

Roger is my cat.

"I don't know," I say. "He's probably hiding somewhere."

"Why is he hiding? Did he do something wrong?"

"No," I answer. "He's just playing. He plays by himself that way."

Gus is my neighbor. Her real name is Augusta. She hates that name. Her mother calls her Gussie. She doesn't like that name either. Her father calls her Gus. That's the name she likes.

Her father is real tall, much taller than my father. When he comes home in the evening, Gus turns her face up to him and says, "Hiiiii, Dad!" And he looks down at her, *way* down, and says, in his deep voice, " 'Lo, Gus!"

Gus rolls over on the floor and makes believe she's sharpening her claws on the rug. "Mrrrowr!" she growls. "I'm Roger."

"Roger!" I say. "Where have you been?"

"Mrrow," says Gus, "I've been under the sofa."

"You sure are a funny-looking animal," I say. "What a face full of fur you have! And a tail that stays straight up when you walk! And you walk on four legs at a time! Really, Roger, that's so silly of you!"

Gus says, "What's really silly is *you*! You've got a face full of skin—what could be sillier than that? And you've got no tail! How can you be without a tail? Only things with tails are proud. What's there for *you* to be proud of?"

"Plenty," I say. "Look how I stand straight up! *You* need to walk on four legs, and *I* walk on only two!"

"Big deal!" says Gus. "You only *have* two legs!"

I say to Gus, "You say only things with tails can be proud. But that's not true. You don't have to have a tail to be proud of what you are. People can be just as proud as cats."

But all Gus says is, "Peacocks have tails and are proud. Cats have tails and are proud. You're not a peacock. You're not a cat. And you don't have a tail. So you can't be proud! Mrrrowr!"

ii

I'm staying the summer here on the farm with my grandmother and my grandfather. And my sister Suki. My father had to go to Japan on a business trip. He makes furniture.

Gus lives in the house next to the farm. She has a horse. His name is Tchaikovsky.

My grandfather looks like Abraham Lincoln. He's sitting in the rocking-chair. (My grandfather, I mean—not Abraham Lincoln.) The rocking-chair has my grandmother's shawl thrown across its back. I always wonder why the chair wears the shawl instead of her.

I climb up on my grandfather's lap and I look at his hands. He has such big hands! And the skin on the palms of his hands is so hard! I guess that's what happens when you work hard like he does.

"Grandfather," I say, "tell me about when you were a sailor."

"I can't remember," he says. "It's too long ago."

"Sure you can remember, grandpa," I beg. "You can if you want to."

He says, "It's so long ago, it seems like it happened to someone else."

"What was it that seems like it happened to someone else?"

"Why should I tell you someone else's story?" he says.

"Grandpa, *please*!"

My grandfather frowns at me. Then he sighs. Then he says, "We were sailing from Boston to Bombay, hugging the coast of Africa. It was late one afternoon, and we were so close to shore, I could see the trees and the beaches. The sun made the sand sparkle like it was mixed with gold. And then I saw the lions."

"The lions?"

"That's right, lions. They were full-grown, but they were playing on the beach just like kittens, rolling on their backs, wrestling with one another, crouching and leaping and pretending to bite and scratch each other—"

I interrupt. "I wish Roger could have played with them! Out here on the farm, he has no friends! All he wants to do is chase birds!"

"The lions had golden eyes, and golden manes, and golden tufts at the tips of their tails," he says. "That's what we saw from the boat."

"What happened then?" I ask. "Isn't there more?"

"No," my grandfather says, with a smile on one side of his mouth, the side that works better than the other side. "That's the end of my tale. And it's time for you to go to bed!"

"I can't go to bed before I've said goodnight to Roger, and I don't know where he is."

"You don't *have* to say goodnight to Roger," says my grandfather. "Just go to bed."

I begin to get tears in my eyes. Just then, my grandmother comes in from the kitchen. She's holding Roger under the forelegs. His hind legs are hanging down. "Here's your cat, Kio," she says to me. "He was after the cottage cheese again."

I kiss Roger and rub my face against his. "Good night, Roger," I say. "Be good, now." Roger purrs. I run upstairs to bed. Then I run back downstairs.

"Goodnight, grandmother. Goodnight, grandfather."

"Pleasant dreams," says my grandmother.

"I already know what I'm going to dream of," I tell her. "Lions on the beach, with a gold sun and gold trees and gold sand on the beach. Only the water is different. It's green and a little blue, like Roger's eyes. The lions will be rolling on their backs in the sand, and—"

My grandfather growls, "Go to bed!" and I scoot up the stairs with Roger.

iii

Suki is 16. I'm 7. My father's name is Lee and my mother's Hope. Only, I have no mother.

iv

I'm in the bathtub. It's the big, old-fashioned kind that stands on four legs. But the legs have no knees, so I guess they're really just feet. They look like lions' feet. Does your bathtub have feet?

The water is awful hot. The bathroom fills with steam.

I keep the water running. The tub fills up to the little hole that the water runs into when it runs over. I like the gurgle it makes as it runs into that hole. (Does the water run *into* the hole or *out* the hole?)

I hold my nose and go completely under water. Now the gurgling sound is much louder. Everything sounds

louder under water. I guess water does to sounds like what Grandma's magnifying glass does to the words she reads.

I'm a submarine. I'm moving under the South Pole. Slowly. Carefully. Look out, iceberg ahead! We almost hit it! But now we're trapped in the ice! We'll have to work our way free. Easy now, men. Easy—a little more to the left. There—that does it! Okay, we can come up to the surface now. Thank you, Captain.

I float on my back. I'm an island in the ocean. There's water all around me. Even the air is misty.

Steam is water. Ice is water. Water is water. Everything is made of water.

I'm a fish. My sister is a fish. My father is a fish. My mother was—is a fish.

I sink down to the bottom of the ocean. I rest on the sand. I roll in the sand. I'm a fish in the sand. Grains of sand. Grains of gold. I'm a fish in the golden sand.

Everything is wet. In all the world, in the whole, whole world, there's just water—nothing but water.

I soap myself. I'm a slippery seal. I try to balance the cake of soap on my nose. It keeps slipping off.

I hate little bits of leftover soap. Cakes of soap should be made hollow so that nothing gets left over.

I let the water out and rub myself dry with a towel. It feels good. I think of Tchaikovsky. I like to help rub him down.

I'm not going to think about the house by the lake.

Those boys who live on the next farm told me all about it. Someone walks around the attic at night there and makes groaning sounds. I'm *not* going to *think* about it!

I'll think some more about Tchaikovsky—how he nuzzles me when I pat his nose and how happy he is when he runs in the corral. Sometimes he runs so fast that all his feet are off the ground, almost like he was flying. I wonder if there could ever be such a thing as a flying horse. How big would a horse's wings have to be?

If Tchaikovsky had wings, would anyone dare to ride him? But oh, boy, what a ride that would be!

CHAPTER TWO

"Mama," I say, "can some people hear better than others?"

"Yes, Gussie," Mama says.

I ask, "Are there some people who can't hear at all?"

"I'm afraid so."

"I hear well, don't I, Mama?"

"Oh, my, yes! Lots of times you hear things *I* can't hear." She bends over and kisses me goodnight. "Now, you go on to sleep."

I'm not ready to go to sleep. "I can touch and smell and taste okay too, right?"

"Of course, dear! You do those things so well! Some people can't do those things nearly as well as you can."

"Besides seeing, Mama, is there anything else I can't do?"

"No, Gussie."

"Mama, are there some things I'm really good at?"

"Let me see—you behave well, and you think well, and I guess what I'd have to say is that you're just a beautiful child."

"Do all mothers say their children are beautiful, Mama?"

"I imagine so."

"Oh."

"What's the matter?"

"So you'd say that even if I wasn't?"

"No, Gussie, no! That's not true!"

"It *is* true. And it's *not fair!* You know I can't see for myself how I look!"

"If you don't believe *me*, Gussie," Mama says, "who *would* you believe?"

I don't answer because I can feel the tears starting to fill my eyes, and I don't want to start crying.

"Would you believe Daddy?"

I say, "If all mothers tell their children they look nice, then all fathers do too. So what would it mean if Daddy said so?"

"Well, Gussie, is there *anyone* you'd believe?"

I pout and don't answer.

"Gussie, please tell me, since it seems to mean a lot to you: who *would* you believe?"

I mumble, "Kio, maybe."

"Kio!" Mama says. She sounds a little shocked.

"That's right," I say. "Maybe if Kio says it, I'll believe it."

Mama smoothes my hair and says, "I always try to tell you the truth, Gussie."

I say, "What good is that if it's not the *real* truth?"

Mama tries to put her arms around me, but I don't let her. I hide my face in the pillow.

"Daddy," I say, after I've climbed up on his lap, "am I nice-looking?"

"You know I think you're the most precious thing in the world," Daddy says. "And you're as beautiful as you are precious. So now you tell me: how nice do I think you look?"

"Oh, Daddy!" I say. "Don't tease me with all those words!" He doesn't say anything, so I shake him and say, "Daddy, you didn't answer my question!"

"What's the best dessert you can think of?" he asks.

"The best? Absolutely the best? A banana split with whipped cream and everything!"

"Well, you look the way a banana split tastes."

I grin. "What else?" I say. "Tell me! What else? *Tell* me!" I shake him by the shoulder.

Daddy says, "What smell do you like the best in all the world? And don't say the smell of gasoline or the smell of laundry soap."

I laugh. "No, Daddy, but it's not a flower either. It's the stuff Mama puts behind her ears when you and she go out together."

"Okay," Daddy says, "you look the way Mama's perfume smells. And since you like music so much, tell me one more thing: what's the nicest music of all?"

I think about that for a long time, and then I say,

"Mama singing me to sleep, like she does sometimes. Every note she sings is always so simple and clear and round."

Daddy says, "Right, that's just how you look—the way Mama sounds when she sings you to sleep. And that's your face: simple and clear and round."

I ask, "Daddy, will Kio ever tell me what I look like?"

"I don't know. But maybe you shouldn't ask him."

I put my head on his shoulder and say, "I *know* that! Gee, I'm not *stupid,* y'know."

iii

"Kio," I say, "my father and mother got me some real clay. I've already made a cat, like Roger. Do you want to try it out?"

"Sure," Kio says. I take him to my room and give him my clay cat. "You make something!" I say to him.

"What should I make?" he says. "I know! I'll make a peach!" He rolls some clay in his hands until he has a round ball, then he gives it to me. "There!" he says. "A peach."

"That's silly," I answer. "Look, let me show you." I take a bit of clay and roll it into a little ball. "That's the pit," I say. Then I add some more clay around it. "That's the part you eat," I say. And then I wrap another layer of clay around the whole thing. "That's the skin."

Kio says, "All I see is the skin."

"Sure, maybe that's all you *see*," I say, "but you *know* that what *I* made is really like a peach and *yours* isn't. Mine's a peach all the way through!"

Kio doesn't answer for a moment. Then he hands me some clay and says, "Make a head."

So I do, and I explain it to him while I work. "See, first I make the inside of the throat and the mouth. Then I put the tongue in. Then I add the teeth, all around the gums. Then I put the lips over the teeth. Then I put the top on the head, push the nose out from the inside, and make the eyes with my fingernails. Then I add the hair, and there it is."

"I start from the outside and you start from the inside," he says.

I answer, "But you never *get* inside! You just *stay* on the outside! *That's* not the way to make a head!"

"It's the only way I know," Kio says.

"It *was* the only way you know," I answer. "Now you know *two* ways."

iv

Kio tells me the story his grandfather told him about the lions on the beach. I say, "I don't understand about the color gold."

Kio says, "Gold. It's like—it's like—yellow."

"I don't understand yellow either."

"Oh, that's right. Well, let me think. You know what

honey tastes like, don't you?''

''Yes.''

''Well, honey looks just like it tastes: the taste of honey is like the color of gold.

''Oh!'' I say. Then I tell Kio, ''I know where honey comes from!''

''Who doesn't know that? It comes from bees.''

''No, it doesn't. It comes from honeysuckle.''

Kio tries to argue with me, so I take him out to the backyard where we have a honeysuckle vine, and I show him how to bite the little ends off the flowers and suck the sweet stuff out of them.

''So that's why it's called honeysuckle!'' Kio says. ''I didn't know about that.''

I'm about to say, ''There are lots of things you don't know, Kio.'' But instead I say, ''Who can know everything?''

We go down to the barn. The hay smells so good! Tchaikovsky lets me hold his head.

Whenever I hold something—whether it's Tchaikovsky or an acorn or a book—I can't help wondering: where did it come from before it got here? And where will it go when it leaves here? I just can't help wondering why things happen the way they happen, and not some other way.

I keep asking questions, and finally my mother will say, ''Gussie, *must* you know *everything?*''

''Sure I must, mama,'' I say. ''But it's okay if you don't tell me all at once.''

CHAPTER THREE

i

It's evening. I'm getting sleepy. I need a story. You know how that is, don't you?

"Grandpa," I say, "What were you before you were a sailor?"

"I grew up on a farm," he says. "I couldn't wait to go to sea. Later on, I couldn't wait to get back to the farm."

"Did you ever fall in the water while you were a sailor?"

Grandpa smiles his crooked smile, one side up and one side down. "More than once," he says. "But the only time I had a really close call was when I was out in a motorboat off Newfoundland one summer."

"Tell me!" I beg. "Tell me!"

"Well, I ran into something. I don't know what it was—maybe a half-sunken boat. I never saw it. But I got thrown against the wheel and it broke my arm. Then the boat tipped over, not all the way, but far enough to throw me into the water."

"With a broken arm, you couldn't swim! You could have drowned!"

"Yes, but that wasn't the worst. The rudder jammed on the boat and it started going in circles. It kept coming closer and closer, and I couldn't get out of the way. I thought that, at any minute, I'd be pulled under the boat and into the propellor."

"What happened! Did the boat run out of gas?"

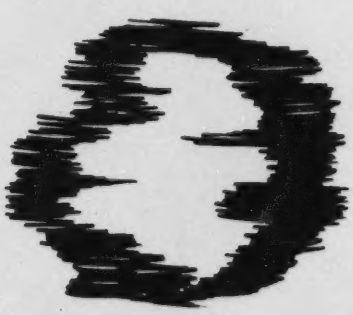
"No. All of a sudden I heard a roar, like an approaching train. And then it broke out with a great splash, like a locomotive coming up from the bottom of the sea."

"It was a whale!" I say. "I'll bet that's what it was!"

"You're right! That's *just* what it was. And he looked at me and I looked at him. He was only a young whale, but he sure was a big one!"

"Was he white or blue or grey—what color was he, grandpa?"

"He was grey and he had a funny kind of mark, I guess it was a birthmark, not far from his eye." Grandpa picks up a tablet and pen. "It looked like this:



"What did he do then, grandpa, tell me!"

"He swam right for the boat, and with one smack of his tail, he smashed it to bits."

"He saved your life!"

"That he did."

"But he didn't *know* that, grandpa. Probably he was just frightened of the boat, or angry with it. He didn't *mean* to save your life."

"He looked me in the eye."

"It was an accident! He came to the surface and you happened to be there!"

"When he came to the surface, he saw everything."

"But he couldn't know—" I start to say.

Grandfather says, "How do *you* know what a whale might or might not know?" Then he adds, "That's the end of the story. Time for bed." He closes his eyes, like he's very tired.

Halfway up the stairs, I call down, "Grandpa."

"What is it?"

"Did you name him?"

"I did."

"What name did you give him?"

Grandpa says the name very slowly: "Le-vi-a-than."

The next day, Gus comes over. We sit in the apple tree. It's easy to climb up into an apple tree because the branches start out so low to the ground. Grandma and Suki are not far away.

I look up and say, "Hey, look, there are four clouds in the sky!"

Gus says, "So?"

"And there are four of us," I say.

Again Gus says, "So?"

"And there are four chickens crossing the road! Isn't it strange? Everything's fours today!"

"Things don't have numbers," Gus says. "Maybe they have names, like Roger and Tchaikovsky. But numbers are only what we make up when we count."

"Why do we count?" I ask.

"Gus says, "I don't know. I guess to find out how many different things there are. If everything were the same, we wouldn't need numbers."

"Or names either," I say.

Just then my grandmother puts her fingers across her lips and points to the chimney of the house. We know that a squirrel has been living there all winter. But now we see that it's a mother squirrel, and she's carrying her babies, one by one, over to the big rock near the tulip tree. She carries four baby squirrels to the rock, and then she runs back and forth, like she's kind of crazy.

"Grandma!" I whisper. "What's the *matter* with her?"

Grandma whispers back, "She's not sure if she's gotten all her babies out."

No one says anything for a minute. Then I whisper again, "Grandma! *She can't count!*"

Like she's talking to herself, Suki says, "Poor thing—you'll never know for sure, will you?"

Then Gus hits at my arm with her fist and says, "What's happening? *Tell* me!"

iii

Instead of being out in the chicken house, Grandpa's just sitting in his rocking chair.

I go into the kitchen where Grandma's busy cooking. "Grandma," I whisper, "is anything wrong with Grandpa?"

"No," she says, "he's just being moody."

"Why's he being moody?" I want to know.

"Because it's his birthday, and on the one hand, he doesn't want anyone to remember it, and yet on the other hand, he's afraid everyone has forgotten it. So he just sits there and broods."

A little later, Grandma tells me to call Grandpa in. He comes in and finds the table set for a party, and a big birthday cake, and some presents. "What's all *this*?" he says, as if he just can't figure out what's going on.

He sits down at the head of the table. There's a card on

his plate; Grandma put it there.

Suki and I call out together, "What's it say, Grandpa, read it out loud!"

He reads it out loud: "I'm an old man, and have had many troubles, most of which never happened."

We all laugh, and he gets up and he and Grandma hug each other, and Suki wipes her eyes. Grandma does too.

But after the party, he doesn't go outside to work. He goes back to his rocking chair. I wonder what he's thinking, but I'm afraid to ask him.

Gus comes over and I take her down to the meadow, where there's a pond. I've made a bridge out of some boards and cinder blocks. The bridge leads to the middle of the pond, where I have an island made of some empty barrels with a door lying down flat on top of them. I lead Gus across the boards and then we sit down on the door.

After a while, I tell her about Leviathan. I even explain his birthmark to her by drawing it with a little stick on the back of her hand.

"Where do you think he is *now?*" she asks.

I answer, "I never thought of that! Do you think he's still alive?"

"He could be. Whales live a long time. Where did your grandfather see him?"

"In some place called Newfoundland."

For a long time, Gus doesn't say anything. Then she says, "Kio, your grandfather thinks Leviathan is still

alive.''

I can't imagine how Gus can know what Grandpa thinks. All I can say is ''Really?''

''Yes. And that's why he's unhappy. He thinks he's got to go looking for him.''

''Grandpa can't go looking for him! He's not able to!''

''He can do it if he wants to,'' Gus says.

''Even if he wanted to, he wouldn't admit it.''

''Kio, it's important! Talk to him some more about whales. Maybe he'll decide all by himself that he wants to go see them.''

''It isn't easy for me to talk to Grandpa. And I can't make him do anything he doesn't want to do.''

Gus just says, ''When you get a chance, Kio, talk to him.''

We sit for a while longer on the door; then I take Gus's hand and we go back to the farmhouse.

iv

I'm sitting with Gus at the kitchen table. I'm reading the comics to her. Roger jumps up on the table and lies down on the newspaper right in front of me.

''Roger!'' I yell at him. ''Can't you see I'm trying to read?''

Gus says, ''Mrrrow, what's *reading*?''

''There are words printed on the page, Roger,'' I say, ''and I look at them and try to figure out what they mean.

That's reading."

"Words?" Gus says. "Mrrow, what are words?"

"These little black spots on the paper."

"And what do you read them with?"

"My eyes. I keep my eyes on them."

Gus says, "I keep my paws on them."

"Roger," I holler, "will you please get *off my comics*?"

"I'm reading," Gus says quietly. "Please don't yell—you disturb me."

"Hey, you two," says Suki, "how would you like to go on a little picnic next week? I'll make some sandwiches."

"*Now* you're talking!" I answer. "That's a *great* idea! Where would we go?"

"To the lake—so we could go swimming."

"I don't want to go to the lake," I say.

Suki laughs and says, "Don't tell me you believe those tories about the haunted house!"

I don't answer Suki, but Gus says, "Fraidy cat!" She also rubs one finger across the other, as if to say, "Shame on you!"

I guess we're going to have a picnic by the lake.

CHAPTER FOUR

i

Guess who we're having to dinner! I knew you'd never guess. It's Suki and Kio! They'll be here any minute!

When I asked my mother about inviting them, I was sure she'd say no. It just goes to show that you never know what parents will do. Have you noticed the same thing?

There'll be just the six of us: my mother, my father, Suki, Kio, me and my brother Brad, who's home from college. Brad's been saying all day he's going to stay up in his room. He can be *so mean!*

It's them! It's them! They're at the front door!

My mother and father know Kio, because he's been around here a lot. But this is the first time they've met Suki. My mother says, "Gus, run upstairs and get Brad."

I run upstairs and pound on his door. "Mama says come downstairs for dinner!" There's no answer. I'm afraid to yell too loud, because I don't want Kio and Suki to hear. "Brad," I say through the keyhole, "please?"

He says, "Go soak your head in a bucket of water."

"Brad," I say, "Kio's here *with his sister.*"

You know what? All of a sudden the door opens and there's Brad! Mama looks up the stairs and says, "Brad! How come you're not Mr. Grungy today? And what in the world did Gussie say to you to make you change your mind—and your shirt?"

As we start down the stairs, my father calls up, "Brad, I want you to meet Kio's sister Suki."

Suki looks up at Brad coming down the stairs and says, "It's you!"

Brad gives her a funny look and says, "I could say the same thing!"

My father asks, "Do you two already know each other?"

"I usually go swimming alone—at the cove at the other side of the island," Suki says. "But for the last few days I haven't been the only one there."

"She wouldn't tell me her name, so I wouldn't tell her mine," Brad says.

My father goes to the kitchen and brings out some appetizers. Suki and Brad each take a cracker with some cheese dip and move off towards the porch. Kio's eating so much I have to tell him to save room for dinner. While he and my father are talking about how Kio likes the farm, I slip into the kitchen.

"Mama," I say, "would you tell me something?"

"I'll try," she says. "What is it you want to know?"

"If Brad marries Suki, could I still marry Kio?"

My mother chokes a little on something she's eating. After a while she says, "Of course, if you both want to when you grow up."

"Why wouldn't we want to?"

"Gussie, you're always asking *questions*!"

"Mama," I say, "what *else* am I supposed to ask?"

ii

I used to have to come home for dinner, but now I can stay for dinner at Kio's if I'm invited. I can even stay until nine o'clock, because Brad will come get me and bring me home. He sure must like me better than he used to.

After dinner Kio and I take turns standing on our heads: I count while he does it and he counts while I do it, to see who can stay upside-down longer. Then we take turns spinning around until we fall over. And then we roll over and over and over down the long sloping lawn.

Kio's grandfather is sitting in a lawn chair, with Roger in his lap. It's suddenly very quiet on the farm, because the chickens have all gone to sleep.

"Grandfather," Kio says, "you kill your chickens, don't you?"

"I don't do it myself, Kio. I send them to the market and they kill them there."

"Would you send Roger to be killed?"

"A cat? Who'd eat a cat?"

"Well, I mean, if people did like to eat cats, would you send Roger?"

"No, of course not. We know Roger personally."

"I don't understand."

"Roger has a name—his own name. He's Roger. He's not just a cat. He's one of the family."

"Oh," I say, "so if we gave names to all the chickens, then you wouldn't send them off to market, is that right?"

Kio's grandfather says, "I'm afraid that wouldn't be quite enough to make them part of the family. But if you have a hen you're especially fond of, and you give it a name, I promise you I won't get rid of it."

Kio says, "I'll bet every day, all over the world, there are millions of people eating millions of chickens."

Kio's grandfather says, "That's true. But there's no danger we'll kill off *all* the chickens. What I worry about are the animals that are being killed off even though they *can't* be replaced."

"Like what?" Kio asks.

"Like what? Like the rhinoceros, and the whale! And look at how we kill all those baby seals each year!"

Suki says, "They saved the trumpeter swan. For a while there were only a few of them left, but now there are thousands of them again."

Suki's grandfather sort of snorts, the way Tchaikovsky does, and he says, "If they killed off all the trumpeter

swans, there would still be other *kinds* of swans left. But they're not just killing off one kind of rhinoceros or one kind of whale! They're killing off *all* of them!''

''It's not too late to save them, Grandfather,'' says Suki.

''Time's running out fast!''

''Still,'' says Kio's grandmother, ''it isn't whales that are in the greatest danger.''

''Oh, no?'' Kio grandfather says. ''What animal could be in more danger of extermination than the whale?''

''Humans,'' his grandmother says. ''One more war and just about everything will disappear. There won't be a single person left.'' Then she gives me a hug, as if to tell me not to worry.

All I can say is, ''Gee, we're even worse off than *chickens*!''

iii

It's Kio's turn to come to my house in the evening, and to play on my lawn. Kio has a jar, and I ask him what he's doing with it.

''Catching fireflies,'' he says.

I don't know much about fireflies. Do you?

Kio tells me all about them. He catches one and lets me hold it. I'm surprised it isn't hot, like an electric light bulb. I hold it in the palm of my hand and whisper to it, ''I'm a firefly too. I don't need the sun. I have my own light.''

Then suddenly there's a squeaking in the air, and Kio shouts, "A bat! A bat!"

After a while the bat flies away and Kio stops running after it. I say, "Is a bat a mouse with wings like a bird, or is it a bird with a body like a mouse?"

My father explains to me all about bats, and how they can't see and yet they know where they're flying because they make these squeaking noises and then listen to the echoes. I cup my hands together and whisper to the space inside, like there's a bat in there: "Hello, in there! I'm a bat too! Come visit me again sometime!"

Just as I finish my bat talk, there's a funny noise from the side of the house, like someone throwing a pebble against a window.

"What was *that*?" my mother wants to know.

"I know!" Kio shouts. "It was a bird that flew into the window! Here it is! It's dead!"

He picks it up. It's a tiny sparrow. "Let *me* have it!" I say. "Let *me*!" I hold it cupped in my hands. It hardly has any weight, and it isn't moving. It doesn't seem to be breathing, either.

My father says, "It may just be stunned."

I whisper to it, "Come on now, sleepyhead, it's time to get up!" And do you know what? It opens its beak, and then it lifts its head, and a moment later, as I open my hands, it flies off.

My mother says, "How come you didn't become a sparrow, Gussie?"

I can't explain to her that I could be *a* sparrow, but not *this* sparrow. This sparrow flew once and it would fly again, but for a little while there it didn't know *what* was going on around it. That's not like me *at all*!

"One minute it seemed dead, and the next minute it flew off, like nothing ever happened to it," Kio says. Then he adds, "Funny, I didn't think there was any hope for it."

I know I'm going to cry, so I run in the house and crawl behind the sofa. I wish I knew why I'm crying.

Brad comes in and picks me up. I throw my arms around his neck and I get the shoulder of his shirt soaking wet. "Let's go for a ride," he says.

He puts me on the front seat of the car, next to him, and backs out the driveway. The wheels of the car crunch the pebbles in the driveway.

We drive through the woods and then along the lake. I can smell the water. I'm beginning to feel better, and when I hear the bullfrogs, I can't help imitating them: "Ko-ax, ko-ax," I say, making my voice as deep as I can. But of course my voice is nowhere nearly deep enough.

I love the sound of the locust. Brad says it's a cicada, but I tell him Daddy said that "locust" and "cicada" are just two different names for the same thing. Brad says they sound "like an orchestra tuning up," whatever *that* means.

I snuggle up against Brad. "Are there birds that can't fly?" I ask.

"Sure," he says. "Ostriches."

"What do they do?"

"They walk around. If they have to, they run."

"Do they live around here?"

"No. I'm afraid not." He rubs the top of my head with his knuckles. "But I'll tell you what: I'll show you something even better. I'll take you to the haunted house."

"I thought we would visit it when we went on a picnic with Kio and Suki."

"No," Brad says, "this won't be a picnic. We're going to visit there in the middle of the night."

"I'm not a fraidy cat, Brad. Are you?"

All he says is "Mrrrowr!"

CHAPTER FIVE

I'm sitting on the window seat, looking across to Gus's house and wishing I could ride Tchaikovsky.

I think of yesterday, when grandpa took me into town, and we went into a place where we had hamburgers for lunch. Grandpa just couldn't *believe* the way I put ketchup all over my french fries. The things he wonders at! I wonder if all grownups are like that—puzzled by just the things any kid would take for granted.

I put ketchup on practically everything. Don't you?

Next to the table where we were eating was a coatrack. It had a sign that said, "Watch your hat and coat." The coatrack was empty, of course, because it was summertime.

The sign bothered me, so I said, "Grandpa, why does it say, 'Watch your hat and coat'?"

He said, "Because they might disappear."

So I guess there are things in the world that will disappear if you don't watch them! Isn't that weird!

Suki calls me from the kitchen. I untangle myself from the window seat, where I've been sitting cross-legged,

and start to run across the living room. But I trip on the carpet and knock over one of Grandma's plants.

Suki comes in, sees all the dirt, and says, "I'll get the broom." She goes to the closet, but the broom's not there! "I don't understand!" she says. "It's *always* here. Where could it be? It couldn't just *disappear*!"

But could it? What about those hats and coats? What if brooms are the same way, and stay in place only so long as someone looks at them? I tell Suki what I'm thinking.

"Naaah," she says, "it doesn't matter whether a broom is watched or not. It can't get up and walk away. It just stays wherever it's put."

"But Suki," I say, "how can we be sure of that? For all we know, maybe the whole world disappears when no one's looking at it."

Suki sort of sniffs and says, "Kio, if no one was looking when the world disappeared, no one would know the difference, would they?" Then she laughs and says, "Oh look, here's the broom, between the wall and the refrigerator!"

"I think we'd better keep our eyes on it," I say. "Next time it gets out of sight, maybe it won't come back, no matter *where* we look for it."

Gus comes in. I tell her about the coatrack and the broom. She claps her hands together and says, "Oh, I know just what you mean! That happens to me all the time! When I can't touch things, I can't be sure they're still around. That's why I always love to feel the floor

under my feet, and to touch the tables and chairs and whatever other kind of furniture there is in the world. I'm always so scared when I've nothing to touch, because I'm afraid the world might have just picked up and left."

Suki looks a little worried and says, "Still, Gus, you *do* know it's there, don't you? You don't *really* believe it disappears, do you?"

Gus laughs. "It doesn't disappear, because as far as I'm concerned it never appeared. It only appears to people who can see." Roger comes in and jumps up on Gus's lap. "Oh, Roger," Gus says, "*here* you are! I just know you were out chasing squirrels again."

"You don't *see* him chase squirrels, but you *know* he does?" I ask.

"Well," Gus says, "that's what you and Suki tell me he does, and if you say so, I believe you. But that doesn't keep me from wondering where the night goes when it's day, or where the cold goes when your ice cream melts, or where the flavor comes from when your grandmother bakes bread. You tell me that grass is green, but is it green all through the night or does it stop being green in the evening and start in again in the morning?"

Suki sits on the floor alongside the chair Gus is sitting in, and says, "Is that how you understand things, Gus, that the colors we don't see and the sounds we don't hear and the tastes we don't taste are all out there *somewhere,* waiting their turn?"

Gus smiles and runs her fingers down the middle of

Suki's head, where her hair is parted, and along Suki's eyebrows and eyes and nose and cheeks and mouth. Then she shakes her head. "You make it sound like a big heatre, and the actors who aren't onstage are all offstage waiting their turns." She touches Roger's ears and he flicks them. She touches his back and he arches it. "I'd like to believe that, because it's the *good* actors and actresses who are called back, and maybe it's the same way with the good tastes and odors—and feelings and thoughts too."

Suki runs her hand through Gus's hair and says softly, "People who see often don't appreciate what it is to touch. Touching has no wonders for them. They no sooner see a peach than it's eaten, and they never get to feel the weight of it in their hands, or to grip the roundness of it, or to touch the soft fuzz on its skin. And yet, even if it were only a stone, it would still be marvellous to hold."

Gus bends over and rubs her cheek lightly for a moment against Suki's cheek. Then she straightens up in her chair. She says, "I *would* like to see the bright reds and the shiny yellows and greens and golds that everyone talks about. I didn't used to think much about it, but now I do, sometimes. I find myself saying to myself, 'I want to be in touch with the world the way everyone else is in touch with it.' But then I find that I can't wish that just for myself, and I want *everyone* to know what no one knows but me. Otherwise it wouldn't be fair. I've no right to

keep all I know to myself."

Suki puts the bowl of fruit in front of Gus, and Gus chooses an orange, which she starts to peel.

"Are oranges really orange in color?" she asks.

"Sure," I say, "and it's a bright color, just like it's a bright taste."

"Mrrowr," says Gus. "Bright mind."

ii

I go down the dirt road to the mailbox. Benjy and Tom, the two boys from the next farm over, are down there. Tom is throwing stones at a turtle.

Benjy says, "Hey, cut that out! What's that turtle doing to you?"

Tom doesn't answer Benjy. He turns around and says, "Kio, have you been down to the house by the lake yet?"

"No, not yet," I say. I don't tell him anything about being scared.

"We've been back there lots of times," Tom says. "We've been up in the attic during the day, but we haven't found anything."

Benjy adds, "But whatever it was that was walking around at night, it's still doing it."

I swallow hard and manage to say, "It is?"

"Yep!" Tom says. "It like *drags its feet* across the floor."

"Right!" says Benjy. "It like *shuffles*. I mean, it sort of like *moans*."

"We were thinking maybe it's a ghost," Tom says.

Benjy says, "Yeah, but how could a ghost make the floor board creak? I mean, a ghost doesn't have any weight."

"There *are* no ghosts!" I tell them.

"Oh, in that case they weigh even less," Tom says with a smile.

I get the mail out of the mailbox. My palms are sweating. I tell myself it's stupid to be afraid of something that doesn't even exist. But my palms still keep sweating. They must not believe me.

CHAPTER SIX

I pull at Kio's sleeve. "Hurry up," I whisper. "Brad doesn't like to wait."

Kio calls out to his sister, "Suki, I'm going over to Gus's house. Maybe Brad will let me ride Tchaikovsky."

"Okay," Suki says, "but be sure you're back here by lunchtime. And be careful."

"Tchaikovsky!" says Kio's grandfather. "What sort of name is that for a horse?"

"I don't know," Suki says. "But he's awfully gentle with children. Kio and Gus are very fond of him."

Kio and I meet Brad in the barn. Then I go to Tchaikovsky's stall, open it up, and walk him out to the corral. As I do, I talk real softly to him. I tell him how handsome and nice I think he is. Brad and Kio follow us.

Brad picks me up and puts me on the horse. There was a time when Brad would lead the horse around the corral for me, but he doesn't have to do that anymore. Tchaikovsky knows by my *feel* where I want to go. And by my voice. It's the way I press the calves of my legs into his sides, and hold the reins, not just the things I tell him.

You know, some people who can't see have trained

dogs. The dogs do their seeing for them. Brad told me that these dogs have to go to special schools. I don't have a dog, but I have a horse that can take care of me. I think Tchaikovsky knows I can't see. And I bet he understands that he *has* to do my seeing for me when I'm riding him.

I know Tchaikovsky loves me. You should be around sometime when he nuzzles my face, my ears and even my hair. And he loves to play. Sometimes when I'm walking in the corral, he'll sneak up behind me and give me a little push with his nose. Right in the middle of my back. I love it when he does that. I always turn around and give him a big hug.

These are the things I'm thinking as I ride Tchaikovsky around the corral. But then I think, gee, I'm not being very nice: I just *know* Kio is dying for a ride.

"Can Kio have a turn?" I yell to Brad.

"Sure," says Brad, "why not?" He helps me off and puts Kio on. Kio's so excited!. But I still think I should give him a few pointers. After all, he's just a beginner. I explain to him about holding the reins, and using his legs, and sitting just right. And about talking softly to Tchaikovsky, telling him what to do. "You just can't forget these things, Kio. They're very important," I say.

I don't mean to sound like a know-it-all. Kio listens patiently to everything I say.

There usually aren't many cars on the road that runs by the corral. Something's coming now, although it's still a long way off. Now I hear the siren! It's an ambulance,

and it's speeding very fast. There must have been an accident somewhere.

Just as the ambulance gets near the corral, I hear Brad trying to quiet Tchaikovsky down. The siren terrifies him. Suddenly Tchaikovsky rears up on his hind legs and Kio is thrown on the grass! Face down. Brad and I bend over him. But he just lies there.

The ambulance stops and backs up. Two people hurry out, scoop Kio up, put him in the ambulance and drive off. Tchaikovsky stands around nibbling at some grass. It all seems so strange, that an ambulance on its way to the hospital should cause an accident!

All day I worry. Then, late in the afternoon, Kio's grandmother drives to the hospital in the pickup and brings Kio home. Except for having a broken arm, he's all right. "Hey, Gus," he calls to me from the pickup, "you can be the first one to sign my cast!" I print my name on it in big letters: G-U-S. In smaller letters I add Roger's name, because he can't write for himself.

My mother and father and Brad are there. They keep telling Kio's grandparents how sorry they are. I don't say anything, because I don't know anything to say.

"We should all have been more careful," my father says.

Kio's grandfather says, "Everyone did the best they could. And you can't blame the horse for being scared. It was an accident."

"Grandpa," says Kio, "with the whale, you said it

wasn't an accident!''

''It's not the same thing, boy,'' says Kio's grandfather. He looks angry—I don't know why. Then he adds, ''The horse didn't understand.''

Kio's grandmother looks at him and shakes her head. ''The things you can imagine!'' she says.

ii

Brad is taking Kio and Suki and me to visit the house by the lake at night! Suki says, ''Brad, it's not fair! You should tell us what to expect! You should share what you know with the rest of us!''

All Brad says is, ''You'll find out soon enough.''

''I want to go!'' Kio says. His voice sounds like he's shivering. I don't know why that should be—it's very warm out tonight.

Kio and Suki and Brad have flashlights. We drive out to the lake and park the car. Then we walk along the beach for a while, and I get sand in my shoes. Pretty soon we come to the house.

We have to be very careful going up the wooden porch steps, because they're broken. The porch floor is also full of loose boards, or boards that are halfway rotted through.

Suki has me by the hand, and Brad has Kio by the hand. Brad and Kio go first. They open the front door and it goes *Crrrreeeek!*

"I knew I should have brought my oilcan," Brad says.

All Suki says is, "Please, can we get *on* with this?"

We walk across the empty living room and we start up the stairs. Each step creaks when someone steps on it, so the four of us are awfully noisy. Brad says "Shhhh!" and we walk on tiptoe.

Then, just as we get to the first landing, I hear it! It's like someone walking very slowly, like someone sort of dragging his feet! The sound's not coming from the second floor, it's coming from the attic!

We tiptoe up to the second floor. "Kio!" I whisper. "Are you still there?"

"I-I think so," he answers. Then I hear a sound like someone moaning.

I hold tight to Suki. I just *know* that Kio's holding tight to Brad.

We come to the stairway to the attic. It's narrow and winding. We stop at the top of the stairs, because the door there is closed. I hold my breath.

Then Brad throws the door open and all four of us rush into the attic.

Suki says "Oh!" and Kio says "Oh!"

"What *is* it?" I beg Suki to tell me. "What *is* it?"

Then suddenly, before Suki can answer me, there's a flapping of wings, and I hear something say, "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!"

"An owl!" I say. "Wow! Great!"

"That's right," Suki says, "the biggest owl I ever saw!

I didn't know they came that big!''

''Oh, yes, some owls are enormous,'' says Brad.

I put in, ''He must have been just beautiful.''

''He was, Gus,'' Kio says. ''Just beautiful.''

When Kio says this I get a tingling feeling down my spine. Funny—I didn't feel it earlier, before I knew it was an owl.

''He was just clumping around,'' says Kio. ''Then when we came in, he flew right out the window. Boy, did he have big eyes! They were as big as the headlights on Brad's car.''

''Not quite,'' says Brad. ''But they sure were enormous.''

''We probably scared him more than he scared us,'' I say. I start to giggle. I don't know why. Once I start, I can't seem to stop.

Kio starts laughing too and then he says, ''Maybe next time instead of saying 'Hoo!' he'll say, 'How?' or 'When?' ''

By now, I'm laughing so hard, tears are coming down my face. ''Or maybe he'll say, 'Why?' or 'Where?' or 'Hello, how are you?' ''

Suki and Brad say nothing all this time. Then Kio says, ''Can we still have the picnic tomorrow?'' Can you imagine, thinking about a picnic at such a time?

Boy, sometimes I wonder if all Kio thinks about is food. I guess there *are* times when he's more concerned with what's on the inside than with what's on the outside.

But I don't say anything.

Brad says, "Of course! We'll come pick you and Suki up in the morning. How about it, Kio, were you afraid?"

Kio says, "Yep, I sure was."

"So was I," Suki says. "I'm not ashamed to admit it."

I say, "What's wrong with being afraid? If it had been something really dangerous, it would have been stupid *not* to be afraid. Being afraid isn't anything to be ashamed of."

All Brad says is, "Little Miss Know-It-All."

iii

Kio, Suki and Brad are splashing around in the water. Suki's a regular fish. So is Brad. I prefer digging in the sand.

I can write my name with my finger in the sand. I can't write my name in the water.

I can build sand castles, but who ever heard of building water castles?

I try counting the grains of sand on the fingernail of just one pinkie: one, two, three, four. . . . oh, they're just too small and there's too many of them! How long would it take to count all that are on the beach here?

What if everything's made of little grains of sand? Could they be counted, one by one? Like in the hourglass that we have in the kitchen at home—one grain at a time?

One grain at a time. Each grain of sand takes up *space.* But if you take them one grain at a time, is that *time?*

See, that's why I like sand so much: when I think about it, my thoughts go in all directions!

If nothing moved, there'd be no time. But there *is* time. So it must be because things move.

Does that mean time is what happens when things move?

Or is time what we get when we *measure* how fast things move? Wow, my head is swimming!

I make a tunnel in the sand. The tunnel is big enough for my whole arm.

Yesterday Roger caught a mole coming out of his tunnel. Roger tried to play with the mole and hurt him. Suki made Roger let go of him, and the mole went back underground. Poor ol' mole! I hope he wasn't hurt bad. I hope he's back at work building his tunnels. He works in the ground so fast! He's an engineer, like a beaver.

Afterwards Kio says, "Suki, it was just an ol' mole!"

Kio! Sometimes I wonder if he understands anything about anything!

CHAPTER SEVEN

i

"Grandpa," I say, "what are you thinking about? You hardly talk to us."

"I've been thinking."

"About what?"

"About the whales."

"What about the whales?"

"The summer's more than half over."

"What's that got to do with the whales?"

"The time to see the whales is during the summer."

"Do you have to go out on the ocean to see them?"

"There are places where they can be seen from the shore."

"Are those places far away?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. Very far away."

"How about the other places?"

"The other places?"

"Where you can't see the whales from the shore."

"Oh, yes. You take a boat."

"A big boat, like an ocean liner?"

"No, nothing like that. Just a sight-seeing boat."

"Grandpa, is that what you want to do—go see the whales?"

"Yes."

"Does it have to be this summer?"

"Yes."

"Well, why don't you just go?"

"Kio, you know I've got a lot to do, here on the farm."

"Grandma could look after the farm for a while."

"You think I should just leave her like that and run up to Newfoundland by myself?"

"I didn't mean that at all, grandpa."

"That's good."

"You could take *me*."

"Oh, so now the two of us should skip out together and play hookey for a few days, is that it?"

"Grandpa, do you really want to see the whales again?"

"I've told you that already."

"But you know it wouldn't be easy to go by yourself."

"Right."

"So why couldn't all four of us go?"

"In the pickup? There wouldn't be room enough."

"How about in the Model A? That would hold four—even more, if it had to."

"The Model A? It hasn't been on a long trip in fifty years!"

"It needs to get out too, Grandpa."

"Kio, believe me, it won't hold up for fifty miles."

"But if anything breaks down, *you* can fix it."

"Not by myself, I couldn't."

"You've been working on it all summer by yourself!"

"Mostly just cleaning it up. It's in good running shape."

"Grandpa, Brad's a good mechanic."

"Oh, so you figure there'd be room in the car for the four of us and Brad?"

"Well, he'd *have* to come along! Gus's parents would never let her go all by herself!"

ii

"Suki," I say to her, "Grandpa wants to go see the whales off Newfoundland."

"When?"

"Before the end of the summer. I think he'd go now if he could."

"But how? Grandma would never let him go by himself."

"She could go with him."

"But who'd look after the farm?"

"There are two hired men. They could look after it for a few days."

"How would they go? By train or by bus?"

"He said they could drive the Model A."

"That old rattletrap! It would never get them there and back!"

"Brad's a good mechanic. He can fix anything."

"Brad! Is he going with them?"

"If he knows you're going, *he'll* want to go."

"And I suppose you plan to go too, and take Gus."

"Of course. But there's a problem."

"Just one? I can think of a hundred of them."

"Grandpa doesn't like to put more than two people in the Model A."

"Such a nice, little problem, Kio!"

"We thought about taking the pickup, but the hired men will need it."

"That leaves you with six people and room for only two."

"Grandpa said he'd put four in the Model A if he had to."

"You've still got two left over."

"I know. If you have six and take away four, you still have two."

"So what are you going to do about it?"

"That's what I asked Gus."

"What did she say?"

"She said her father is on vacation the first week of August."

"You mean —"

"She said her mother and father hadn't been that close to Grandma and Grandpa before this summer. You know, before we came, Suki."

"And now?" Suki asks.

"Gus thinks it might be different now." I say.

"In what way?"

"Gus thinks they might feel more neighborly. If everyone agreed, Gus's parents could take *their* car!"

"But it's such a little car!"

"It'll hold four, so that's four in each car: just right!"

"Kio, has Gus talked to her parents about this?"

"No, that's what we wanted *you* to do."

"You want *me* to go to *their* house and talk them into going to Newfoundland to see some *whales*?"

"Oh, no, you don't have to do *that!* Gus is bringing them here!"

iii

"Hi, Gus," I call out, "where are your father and mother? I thought you were bringing them with you."

"They couldn't get away right now," Gus says. "They'll be over later."

"Grandpa," I ask, "while we're waiting, do you know any ghost stories?"

"No," he growls. "Besides, there *are* no ghosts."

Gus says, "It doesn't have to be a *true* story."

Grandpa says, "Even so, I don't know any."

"Was the story about Leviathan true?" I ask.

"Of course it was," says grandpa.

"Tell it to us again."

Grandpa says, "Why, have you forgotten it?"

"I just want to hear some more about Leviathan. Was he scary?"

"Scary? I don't remember being scared. But I do know this: in my whole life, I've never seen anything more *beautiful.*"

Gus says, "My father tells me that the things I make with clay are beautiful."

"Grandpa," I say, "I told Benjy and Tom about Leviathan, and they said if they'd been there, they'd have killed him."

Grandpa frowns. "It's not *right* to kill whales!" he says.

"They don't hurt *us*," says Gus. "Why should we hurt *them*?" Then she adds. "There's something I can't figure out."

"What's that, Gus?" Suki asks.

"If something is beautiful, then does every part of it have to be beautiful too?"

I say, "No! Leviathan could have been beautiful even if he had little, squinty eyes and a funny birthmark. Isn't that right, grandpa?" Grandpa just nods.

Gus goes on, "And if a story is true, does every part of it have to be true?"

Suki scratches her head and says, "Gus, I'm not sure how to answer that. What are you getting at?"

"Well, my father asked me last night if I'd been a good girl, and I didn't know what to say. I do so many things that aren't right. Could I still be a good person?"

I say, "I think what Gus is asking is, if you say true

things and do right things and make beautiful things, does that make you good?''

''No,'' says Gus. ''What I'm asking is, if you say things that aren't true, and do things that aren't right, and make things that aren't beautiful, does that make you bad?''

''I don't know,'' Suki says.

''Grandpa,'' I say, ''what do *you* think?''

''I don't know either.''

''Oh,'' I say, ''that's just great!''

Grandpa says softly, ''I didn't say there were no answers to your questions.''

''How do I find the answers, Grandpa?''

''To questions like that? I'm not so sure. Maybe by talking to other people, and by doing a lot of thinking things out for yourself,'' Grandpa says.

''Oh!'' Gus says.

I turn to her and say, ''But Gus, suppose there really *were* ghosts. Would you want to discover them for yourself?''

She answers, ''What's the problem? Everything is just what it is. Why should we make believe it's something different? Why should we want to fool ourselves? If there are no ghosts, I don't want to think there are. And if there *are* ghosts, I don't want to think there *aren't.*''

''Good girl!'' says Grandpa. ''Now you're thinking.''

I like it when he says that.

iv

My grandfather and grandmother have been talking for a long time to Gus's mother and father. Finally I hear Gus's father say, "Well, then, we're all set! You'll travel in your car with Brad and Suki, and we'll take our car, with Kio and Gus in the back seat."

I nudge Gus with my elbow and she nudges me back. It all went so smoothly! No arguments.

Grandpa takes Gus's father around the farm and shows him where the barn was before it burned down.

Gus's father says, "It must have been pretty awful."

Grandpa says nothing.

"That's a fine stone fence you have around your farm," Gus's father says.

Grandpa says, "My grandfather built it. Whenever he did something, he did it right."

Gus's father says, "It's beautiful, the way he fitted those stones together."

"It's a good fence," my grandfather replies. "And there's a saying that 'good fences make good neighbors.' But that *can't* be so."

"You're right. Sometimes neighbors are better off with no fences at all between them," Gus's father says.

I say, "Maybe they should all take trips together."

"I'm afraid that might be pushing things a bit," Grandpa says.

Suki sits down on the stone fence, takes out her notepad and pencil and starts writing. She's always writing. I often wonder what she finds to write so much about.

Brad sits alongside her. "Hello, good neighbor," he says.

Suki doesn't say anything. She just sort of nods her head a little and keeps on writing.

I say to Gus, "Y'know, there are friends who aren't neighbors, and there are neighbors who aren't friends."

Gus thinks for a while then says, "But if you're a really, really good neighbor, couldn't *that* make you a friend?"

"Only sort of," I say, "C'mon, let's go down to the meadow."

Brad looks at me as if he's glad we're going.

CHAPTER EIGHT

i

Suki says, "Kio, put Roger out."

I pick Roger up and crawl with him behind the sofa. "I don't want to go out," I say. "Mrrrowr!"

Suki says, "Roger, you should go out because you go out *every* night."

"So what? What kind of reason is *that*?"

"All right, Roger, why don't you want to go out tonight?"

"Because it's raining out there, and it's dry in here. Mrrowr!"

"Oh, Roger, that's ridiculous. When it's raining you go under the shed!"

"Not tonight."

"But Roger, you *love* to go outside!"

"How do *you* know?"

"Roger, you're not *afraid*, are you?"

"Who me? Of course not! All I ever meet out there is an old raccoon, or a chipmunk or a skunk maybe. I'd just

rather stay inside tonight. I need to catch up on my sleep.''

''Roger—*outside*!''

''Make me! I'll dig my claws into the carpet so you can't lift me up!''

''All right, if that's what you want me to do, that's what I'll do!''

''This is what always happens—just because you're bigger than I am.''

''Roger, you're not making sense!''

''I am too! Whenever you run out of reasons, you use force!''

''Roger, that's not true!''

''It is too! You think 'might makes right'!''

''Okay, Roger, have it your way. Stay inside tonight. See if I care.''

''I don't want to say inside. I want to go out.''

''Oh, Roger, I wish for once you'd get your story straight! Make up your mind!''

''Why do I have to? I'm a cat! Mrrrowr!''

ii

Gus and I are in the back seat. Gus's father and mother are in the front seat.

Gus has a tablet and the thing she makes marks with. ''What's that for?'' I ask her.

''In case we play games,'' she says. ''Whenever we go

for long trips in the car, we play games, and I'm the scorekeeper.''

''We do too,'' I say. ''What kind of games do *you* play?''

''Mmmm, let me think. Do you know *Stupid Questions*?''

''Oh, sure, I know lots of stupid questions.''

''No, I mean the *game* called 'Stupid Questions.' ''

''I don't think so. How do you play it?''

''Everybody takes turn asking a question,'' Gus says. ''But it has to be really stupid, and if it isn't, you lose a point.''

''What do you mean, '*really* stupid'?''

''Well,'' Gus says, ''a question's *really* stupid if it doesn't make any sense and there's no way of answering it.''

''Give me an example,'' I say.

''Okay. How about this: Is it warmer in the winter or in China? See—it doesn't make sense and there's no way of answering it. You try one, and we'll start.''

I think for a while and then I say, ''Is Roger my grandfather or my grandmother?''

Gus says, ''You lose a point. There's nothing wrong with that question, and I can answer it by saying 'Neither.' Okay, my turn. When is a door not a door?''

I laugh and say, ''That's no better than mine, Gus. I know it doesn't make any sense, but still, it has an answer: a door is not a door when it's ajar! Suki told me

that one a long time ago.''

Gus says, ''So now we're even—one point apiece. Here's one: In the jungle, are there more lions or animals?''

''That's good,'' I said. ''What about this: 'What's the difference between a duck?' ''

''Oh, that's an old one. I know the answer; one of its legs is both the same. How about, What kind of goose do goose pimples come from?''

''Nice!'' I say. ''By the way, what's the score?''

Gus giggles. ''Up to now it was even, one to one. But now I'm ahead, because what you just asked me wasn't stupid!''

iii

After a while we stop for gasoline. I jump out of the car yelling ''Pit stop, everyone!''

Gus says, ''Mmrrrow, which way to the litter box?''

Afterwards, Suki and Brad go in his parents' car, and we pile in with Grandma and Grandpa. Grandpa says, ''First person to see a cow gets a penny.'' Right away, I see a cow and get a penny.

So then we start playing *First Person*: first person to see a sheep, first person to see a crow on a telephone pole—things like that. Gus says, ''It's okay—go ahead. I don't need to play.''

After a while I say, "Grandpa, when we get to Newfoundland, what will you give the first person to see a whale?"

Grandpa reaches in his pocket, takes out a coin and holds it up: it's a bright, shiny silver dollar! "Sing out if you see a whale, and this is what you'll get!" he says.

Grandma keeps her eyes on the road, because she's driving, but she says, "Why don't you just nail it to the mast, like they used to do on the old whaling boats?"

All Grandpa says is "Now, Rachel...." Then he looks around at us and says, "It's beginning to get dark. A penny to the first person to see an inn!"

The words are hardly out of his mouth when I see a sign way down the highway. I yell, "Fireside Inn!" Then I hold my hand out and get my penny.

Gus had slid all the way down in her seat, but now she sits straight up and asks, "What will you give the first person who *hears* a whale?"

I say, "Gus, don't be silly! You can't hear whales."

"*I've* heard them," Grandpa says. "And the first person to hear them on this trip will get *three* silver dollars!"

Gus grins as we get out of the car. She's still laughing to herself as she follows me up the path to the inn, her hand on my elbow.

CHAPTER NINE

After dinner, Kio's grandfather goes off to bed, my father goes into a lounge to look at TV, and Suki and Brad show Kio's grandmother and my mother how to play "Space Invaders." We all play for a while, then Kio's grandmother and my mother sit down by the fireplace, and the rest of us stretch out on the floor.

"Grandma," Kio says, "Grandpa seems different."

"He *is* different."

"How did he used to be, before we knew him?" my mother asks.

"All he thought of was work. Most of all, he loved his barn—and his daughter."

"My mama." Kio says.

"Yes, your mama." Kio's grandmother wipes her eyes. "They quarreled over something that wasn't important, and he wouldn't speak to her or about her any more. But after she died, he wasn't the same. He still wouldn't talk about her, but he no longer got the same joy out of his work."

Suki says, "Then the barn burned down."

"Yes," Kio's grandmother says, "then the barn burned down, and that broke him. For a year, he said almost nothing. Sometimes I would hear him talk to himself, and he would just say, 'Never,' over and over again."

"But he's better now," says Kio.

"Yes, he started to get better when you and Suki and your father came to visit us two years ago, and now he seems still better."

"Grandma."

"What is it, Kio?"

"You gave Suki the poems that Mama wrote."

"Yes, that's right, I did. Have you read them?"

"I've tried to. But I don't understand them."

"I'm sure Suki would help you figure out what they mean."

"It's all right. I don't need to know right now."

"You mean, just having the poems is enough?"

"Yes."

"Why is that, Kio?"

"They're Mama's thoughts, and they don't change."

Kio's grandmother takes off her glasses and cleans them. Suki says, "Grandma, Grandpa so often seems lost in a dream."

Suki's grandmother smiles and says, "Yes, that's true. Hope, your Mama, was like that too. As time goes on he gets more and more like her."

"I'm afraid I'm like that a lot of the time too," Suki says.

My mother says, "People call it 'being lost in thought.' "

I think to myself, "But that's just where I find myself, every day: in my thoughts!"

ii

Brad says, "Guess what! They're having a dance here at the inn tonight!"

"Beer and motorcycles?" my father asks. He doesn't sound exactly thrilled.

"Naw," Brad answers, "it's not going to be like that at all! You'll see: everybody will be here: parents, grandparents, little kids—everyone! And there'll be square dancing—"

"Oh, Brad," I beg, "take *me*!"

"We can *all* go!" Brad insists.

And we *do* all go. Even Kio's grandfather comes back downstairs when he hears about the dance. "With all that noise, I wouldn't have been able to sleep anyhow," he grumbles.

It's just like Brad said it would be. There are square dances, with whole families dancing together—so naturally, my family and Kio's family join in too. Kio's grandfather and grandmother, and my father and mother, and Brad and Suki, and Kio and me.

Next is a fiddle contest, and after that, a guitar contest, where Brad gets second prize.

After that, there's a dance contest. One man, who looks like Kio's grandfather, plays his fiddle while he dances. "What a buck 'n wing!" Kio's grandfather exclaims. "That was great!"

"Mama," I whisper, "can I run upstairs and change?"

"What's wrong with your tee shirt and jeans?" she asks.

"Nothing. But I want to get into my leotard."

"Your leotard! You brought that along?"

"Of course! I bring it everywhere."

My mother goes upstairs with me. "Be careful about that first step," I say. "It's pretty high."

When we come back down to the dance, there are a couple of kids on the dance floor, "throwing each other around," as my father says.

"Who's next?" the man with the microphone calls out.

"*I* am!" I say, and I run to the center of the dance floor. "My brother Brad will accompany me on the guitar," I announce, although I'm sure everyone understands this already. "This dance is from *Billy the Kid.*"

It's a dance I've done lots of times at home, to a record. In one part, I gallop around like I'm on a horse. I hear Kio call out, "Go, Tchaikovsky!"

"Kio!" I think, while I'm dancing. "I wonder if he

knows this ballet. It's so sad when Billy's mother is killed." I finish the dance and sit down. A lot of people clap their hands and want me to come back and do something else, so I go back on the dance floor.

Brad begins to play "The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies" on his guitar, and I hear Suki say, in a loud whisper, "Go, Tchaikovsky!" I dance on tiptoes, my elbows out, and when I hear the murmurs from the crowd, I know they like it.

Again I sit down, and again they push me back on the dance floor. Someone shouts, "Encore! Encore!" It's the first time I've ever heard that. And then I hear Kio's grandfather echo, "Encore! Encore!"

So I go back out and say, "Last one. This will be a fun thing."

Brad says, "I'm sure you all know the music: it's by Gottschalk."

I can tell from the sounds I hear that people are amused by the funny cakewalk I do.

"Oh, Gussie," my mother says, when I sit down, "that was so nice!"

My father says, "You wowed them, Gus!"

I turn to Kio. "Did you like it?" I ask.

He doesn't answer right away, but when he does, he says, "I couldn't believe it was happening. It was super. It was just beautiful."

That was worth more than the prize I won, and all the applause I got afterwards.

iii

We're in the back seat of the car again. Kio's grandmother is driving.

"Kio," I say, "what's another word for 'eight'?"

"Ate?" he says. "How about 'eaten'?"

I say, "No, Kio, not like with food. The *number* eight!"

Kio thinks for a long time. Then he says, "Or."

"Or!" I say. "I never heard anyone say that was the number eight."

"Oh, no?" Kio says. "How about when we play 'One potato, two potato'?"

"That's right!" I say. "One potato, two potato, three potato, four; five potato, six potato, seven potato, or."

Suddenly Kio's grandmother pulls the car over the side of the road and stops. The other car stops behind us. Kio's grandfather gets out, lifts the hood of the Model A and says, "It's that darn fanbelt! I knew I should have replaced it."

My father and mother drive off to get a new fan belt. We sit by the side of the road, with nothing to do but wait.

Kio says to me, "How many fingers do I have on both hands?"

"Ten," I say.

"Wrong! I have eleven. Look, I'll count them backwards on my left hand: Ten, nine, eight, seven, six. Okay? And there's five fingers on my right hand. So add six and five and what do you get? Eleven!"

Brad and Suki find a path in the woods leading up to the top of a hill, so Kio and I go with them to explore. Brad takes his sketch pad; he never goes anywhere without it.

It's much cooler in the forest. Pretty soon we come to a waterfall. It probably comes down in steps—one, two, three, four, then into a pool at the bottom. Brad stops to sketch the waterfall, and we wait for him.

When he's finished, we all go on to the top of the hill. There's a lookout place, with a railing. Kio says he can look down and see all the hills and valleys. And way far off, he can see the ocean.

Brad makes another sketch. Suki explains to me that, in Brad's picture, the land rolls, like waves at sea.

Kio turns to Suki and says, "Suki, it's beautiful!"

"Why do you say that?"

"The way the land rises and falls—like it's breathing."

"What else?"

"The colors—so many different shades of brown and green."

"What else?"

"Each field has a different shape, but they all fit together."

"Anything else?"

"I'm not sure. Suki, do we always have to give reasons when we say something is beautiful?"

"No, not necessarily."

"Suki, if you tell me something is beautiful, should I

believe you?''

''You might if you trust me enough. But you should always try to find out for yourself.''

''And does that go also for what is right and for what is true?''

''It might. I'm not sure. I'd have to think about it some more. There are lots of times when we have no choice but to take things on trust. But that shouldn't keep us from looking for reasons. And if we find them, so much the better.''

After a while we go back down the hill. We return just in time to be told that the new fan belt has been put on the Model A, and we're ready to roll.

Kio's grandfather looks up at the sky. ''Those are rain clouds,'' he says. ''And if the weather's bad, the boats won't go out.''

I'll bet there have been plenty of times you wished it wouldn't rain. That's what I do. I wish as hard as I can. I say to myself, ''Please don't rain! We *can't* miss the whales. We just *can't*!''

iv

We're back in the car again. Kio has been quiet for a while, so I say, ''Kio, what are you doing?''

''Reading.''

''What are you reading?''

"A book."

"What book?"

Kio sighs. "It's called *A Night in the Titanic.*"

"What's it about?"

"Well, the Titanic was an ocean liner that sank in the Atlantic. This story is by a diver who went down and explored it."

"Oh, that sounds exciting! Would you read it to me?"

"Gus, I'm in the *middle* of it! Do I have to go all the way back to the beginning?"

"No, just go on from where you are—I don't care."

Kio begins to read: "By now we're deep in the forward hold of the ship—"

"Kio," I say, "what's a hold?"

"I'm not sure. I think it's like a big storeroom on a boat."

"Go ahead."

Kio starts reading again: "—when all at once my electric torch goes out. I'm completely in the dark. I don't know where Jerry is: he's probably at the other end of the hold. I try to feel my way past some huge crates. At last I find Jerry. His foot is wedged in a hole in the floor—"

"Oh, I know just what that's like," I say. "Once, last year, my father and mother had gone out, and Brad was asleep in his room, and I smelled smoke, so I felt my way to his room—"

"Gus!" Kio says, "How can I read to you if you keep interrupting? Do you want to hear this story or don't you?"

"I'll be quiet," I say. "Read." But to myself I say, "Dumb old Titanic!"

CHAPTER TEN

i

Here we are at the seaport. It isn't raining, but it's very cloudy and windy. The ocean is grey and green and black. There are lots of waves.

We go to the wharf where the boats are. Grandpa asks a man about sight-seeing boats. "No one's going out today," says the man. "The storm won't be here until tomorrow, but the weather's not too good already."

Gus's father says, "It has to be today. I can't take any more time off."

"You could try Pete," says the man. "He's an old pirate, but he goes out in most kinds of weather."

I can just imagine what Pete will be like. I think of him as being very mean-looking, with a kerchief 'round his head, a ring in his ear, a patch over his eye, and a sword in his hand.

When we finally find him, he doesn't look anything like I imagined—except for being mean-looking. Also, he has a gruff voice.

Gus gets next to her father and whispers, "Daddy, I'm afraid of that man!"

The man says he'll take us out to look for whales, and that we should call him Pete. He looks like he's real sick.

"I guess I celebrated too much last night," he says.

"What was it, my father asks, "your birthday?"

Pete laughs. "You can bet your sweet life it wasn't. Yesterday was a year to the day that I got out of—well, never mind."

I see Grandpa and Gus's father look at each other. But they decide to go ahead. So we get on the boat. Pete unties the ropes that hold the boat to the dock, and we're off!

"Grandma," I say, "did you see the name of the boat? It's just like Mama's name! It's the Hope!"

Grandma nods at me, but I can see she's having trouble getting used to being on water. There are big

rolling waves that lift the boat high up and then let it shoot down into a valley. Do you know what it feels like being on the ocean? It's like being on a roller coaster!

After a while we can hardly see the shore. "Look after the whales!" Grandpa hollers. We strain our eyes to see, but all we can see is foam and water. The boat keeps rolling from side to side, and pitching from front to back.

Suddenly Gus pulls at Grandpa's sleeve. "I hear something," she says. All *I* can hear is the screaming of the wind.

He roars at her, "What do you hear, girl? Speak up, what do you hear?"

"It's like singing," she says. "It's like three notes. The second is higher than the first and the third is higher than the second—like this—" and Gus sings it to Grandpa. It sounds so strange!

"That's it!" Grandpa hollers. "You've heard it! It's the sound of the whale!" He fishes in his pocket and pulls out three silver dollars.

But just as he turns to give the silver dollars to Gus, Suki and Brad and I all yell at the same time, "Look out there! It's—it's—"

Then we stand and stare out across the sea, as Grandpa shouts, "You're right! There's something out there! And it's not just one! There's a lot of them! They're *whales*, that they are, *whales*!" And with that he reaches in his pocket again, pulls out three more silver dollars, and gives one to Suki, one to Brad and one to me.

Grandma strokes Gus's hair and at the same time tries to tell Gus what she sees. "There are so many of them," I hear her say, "and they seem to be in a great circle. And now, Gus, oh, my, I've never seen such a thing in my life! One of them has just shot up clear into the air, like a locomotive shooting straight up, high above the water! Now he splashes back down and he's gone! Oh, Gus, that huge head and body reaching up towards the sky! I'll never forget it!"

The boat is steering right towards the whales. We're getting closer and closer to them. I'm speechless. But I hear Suki saying, "Oh, Gus, oh, oh, there's something enormous rising out of the water right in front of us! It's like a tremendous submarine breaking out of the water! It's the biggest whale—and our boat seems so tiny against it! Look at the seawater pour off its back! We're still heading straight for it! If we keep on, we're going to smash right into it!"

I turn to look at Pete. He's fallen over the wheel! He's *really* sick! Grandpa sees him at the same time. He pushes Pete aside and turns the wheel sharply.

The boat turns ever so slowly. But it does turn—and just in time! Now we're moving in the same direction as the whale—we're moving alongside it, up towards his head.

"Gus!" I scream, "I see it! I see it! It's the mark, right below his eye!" I take Gus's hand, and trace the mark on the back of it with my finger, just as I see it on the whale:

We look at the whale and he looks at us. Then he dives, but he doesn't go all the way down. "His tail is straight up, sticking out of the water!" I tell Gus. For a long minute the tail waves against the sky. Then it slides out of sight.

"Grandpa, it was your whale! It was Leviathan!" I say. "He saw you again!"

"That he did, Kio," says Grandpa.

"He recognized you! He saw you steer away from him!"

"Maybe," says Grandpa. "I'd like to think so."

"He grinned at you! I saw him!"

"It just seemed that way."

Grandpa swings the wheel around so that we're heading towards shore. Gus and her mother get on one side of the wheel and I get on the other, so that we can help.

Grandpa says, "Son, we're going to have quite a bit to tell your father when he gets back tomorrow!" He looks down at me and smiles, one side up and one side down.

A wave breaks over the bow of the boat and salt spray splashes against our faces. I press my face against Grandpa's sweater; it's the new one Grandma has been knitting for him all summer.

As we get close to the dock, I say, "Gus, those three notes that you heard—do they mean anything in whale language? Were they trying to tell us something?"

"Of course!" says Gus. "They were saying "Please—please—*please.*"

ii

Well, you wanted to know what we did this summer. Was our story okay?